



FEMA

Missouri Flood Buyout Saves Lives, Heartache, and Money

Jefferson City, MO — The record-setting and unprecedented flooding that lasted from the spring of 1993 into the early part of 1994 served as the catalyst for Missouri governments to look for solutions to the devastation and suffering caused by the massive floods. As a result, voluntary acquisitions, or buyouts, of flood-prone properties using Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), State, and local government funds became the choice of action. The FEMA program has been widely successful and, once again, proved its worth during the floods of 2008.

When 37,000 people were displaced from their homes for prolonged periods during the 1993 flooding, State leaders embarked on a buyout program that became a model for the nation. Because of the large number of displaced residents, coupled with the prolonged flooding, State and local government leaders realized that program's success would be measured according to how quickly the buyouts would take place.

When the State was inundated once again in May 1995 to nearly the same 1993 record flood levels, the program's efforts gained popularity — 2,000 properties had been acquired in 50 separate communities. To date, the State and local governments have completed buyouts in 99 separate communities, totaling 4,045 properties.

"It was an endorsement that the effort was of great benefit to the victims devastated by repeated flooding, and we already had many satisfied customers," says Buck Katt, the deputy director for the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) at the time and the State's main architect of the plan.

Once homeowners have voluntarily participated in the program by selling their property to the local government, the land is deed-restricted and can only be used for open space and certain recreational activities. The specific parcel is no longer eligible for Federal disaster assistance and is the property of the local government.

Thirteen communities along the Mississippi River that had buyouts take place after the 1993 flood were flooded again in 2008. Of the 3,146 properties purchased among these communities, over 50 percent (1,623 sites) of them would have flooded again in 2008.

"Our buyout was so successful at keeping people out of harm's way and reducing damage," says Susan Sedgwick Pohling, St. Louis County's planning manager.

Individual Assistance payments, including grants made to residents of the 3,146 properties listed at these locations prior to the buyout (1993 floods) amounted to \$33.2 million. Because of the buyouts, Individual Assistance funding was unnecessary for those "bought out" families in the 1,623 buyout sites that flooded again in 2008. This significantly contributed to the reduction of Individual Assistance payments—currently less than \$2.1 million, in those 13 communities along the Mississippi River.

Perhaps more striking is the fact that the cost to acquire all 3,146 properties amounted to about \$37 million. The reduction in Individual Assistance payments alone has offset 85 percent of the cost to acquire the 3,146 properties.



Multiple Counties,
Missouri



Quick Facts

Sector:

Public

Cost:

Amount Not Available

Primary Activity/Project:

Acquisition/Buyouts

Primary Funding:

Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)